

Gamejam as Design Method

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Game Design

Orientation: C

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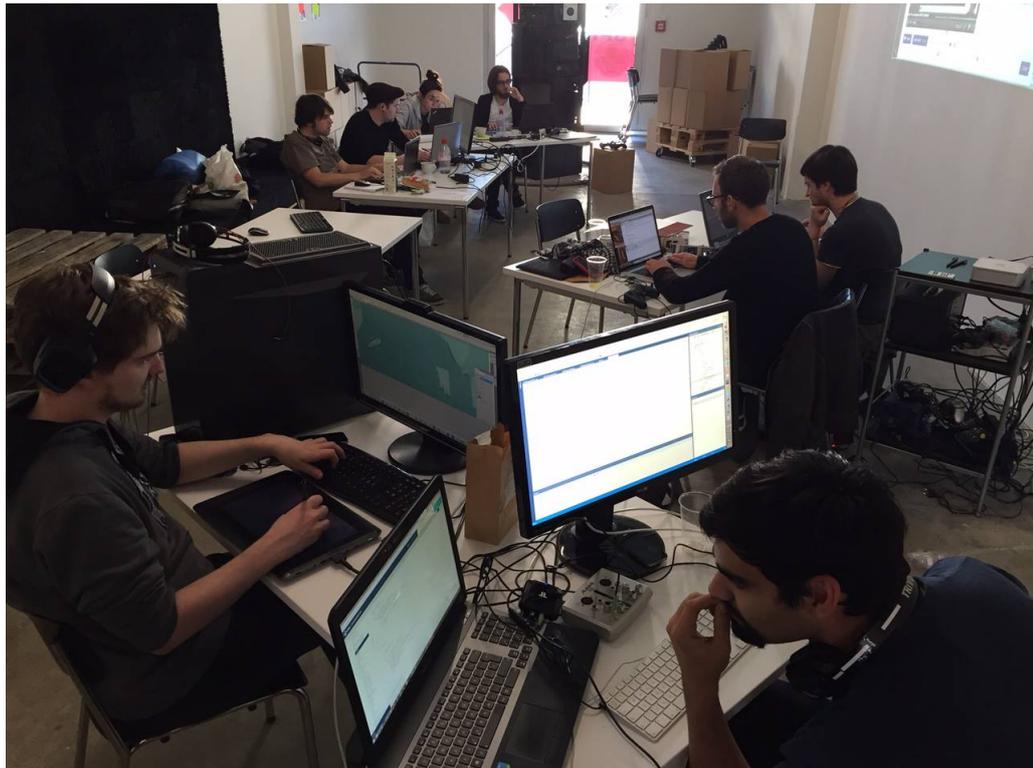


Figure 1: Ludum Dare 32 @ Spielhalle Oslo, Basel

Abstract

A gamejam is a video-game development event, where game designers, programmer, artist and musician come together to create a game in a limited period of time. It takes a process that would take years and compress it in the scale of a week-end. As a design method, it becomes crucial to know how the mechanics of gamejams work and to optimize the event experience. It is also necessary to know how a gamejam entry can be transform into a full-release game.

The goal of my master project is to analyze, categorize and explain the different types of gamejams and how to improve on the current state of the art. Following the development of Super Splash Fistiguffs, a Ludum Dare 32 Jam entry, we will also define Gamejam as a Pre-Production process.

Une gamejam est un événement de développement vidéo-ludique, où des game designers, des artistes et des musiciens se rassemblent pour créer un jeu dans une période de temps limité. C'est prendre un processus qui prendrait plusieurs années et c'est le compresser dans un ordre de grandeur d'un week-end. En tant que méthode de design, il devient crucial de savoir comment les mécaniques intrinsèques des gamejams marchent et comment optimiser l'expérience de l'événement. Il est aussi nécessaire de savoir comment le produit d'un gamejam peut être transformé en un projet complet de jeu commercial.

Le but de ce projet de master est d'analyser, de catégoriser et d'expliquer les différents types de gamejams et de voir comment améliorer la formule. En suivant le développement de Super Splash Fistiguffs, un jeu de la Ludum Dare 32, nous définirons aussi les gamejams comme moyen de pré-production.

Starting point

A gamejam is a video-game development event with the goal of creating a game in a limited period of time. It requires a full range of talents. Game designers, artists, musicians, project managers come together in one place or online go through the all process of video-game development very quickly.

Of course, a gamejam follows certain rules. It can come with themes or technical restrictions. It can be local, online or both. But most of all, there is a time restriction with a deadline when each participant has to upload their game. In most case, the post-gamejam includes a voting process, by the participants or the jury with feedback concerning the game.

Something we often do wrong in the game industry is history. Where are gamejams coming from? Some of the oldest gamejams have become the biggest gamejam, but they did not start with hundreds of game developers around the world.

With the increasing number of gamejams organised, one can ask how to organize one and how to make it popular. The most popular gamejams are also the oldest and they improved their formulas years after years. The democratisation of tool like gamejolt to create gamejams saw an exponential numbers of events of variable quality. One solution could be to organize a local gamejam with an active game development community supporting it and then go online (for example: the Epic Game Jam).

For the participants, there are other challenges. How to go on wit a gamejam entry? The difference between a Pre-Production prototype and a gamejam entry is subtle. The prototype shows a gameplay idea, but the gamejam entry is an entire game. The game developer has to remove part of the gamejam entry to move in a production process he already began with the gamejam. Those issues are discussed in a GDC Vault by Capy in "From Gamejam to Full Game".

Project's Goals

There are different challenges and questions around Gamejams as Design Methods:

- Where are they coming from?
- How to organize them and make one popular?
- How to make a gamejam entry into a full game?
- How to use gamejams as design methods to create game from big concept?

Current status

5 prototypes came out of gamejams:

- Faith, a big concept prototype done on two "gamejams" in two different months with the philosophy of gamejam as design method
- Fresh Off The Boat, a NewsGames Hackathon entry

- Super Splash Fistiguffs, a Ludum Dare 32 Jam entry
- Rise of Akeicha, a Bacon Game Jam 9 entry,
- Meow Zedong, The Urinal Leap Forward, an Epic Game Jam Round#2 entry

Faith is an experimental game about player's expectations and trust. It was not done during an official gamejam, but rather used gamejams as a design method. During very short rushes, the game was implemented. Gamejams here is used as a mean to prototype big concept into video-game.

Fresh Off The Boat was made in 4 hours during the NewsGams Hackathon @ ZHdK. The particularity of it is that it is not mandatory to develop a game, but it is also possible to show a concept at the end. The theme was to develop a NewsGames which is a subset of Serious Games related to news information.

Super Splash Fistiguffs is a Ludum Dare Jam entry, done in 72 hours. It is also a project in progress after being it shown to Fantasy Basel. It will be used in the Gamejam as Pre-Production Process chapter of the thesis.

Rise of Akeicha is a small narrative game done during Bacon Game Jam 9. It is always hard to create a compelling narrative experience during a gamejam.

Meow Zedong, The Urinal Leap Forward is a crazy game done during Epic Game Jam Round #2 with Unreal Engine 4. It is a 3D game which is an enormous challenge for a gamejam.

Planning

- [3-5 July] Epic Game Jam, interviews of participants
- [Beginning of August] Game Boy Jam, participate
- [22-24 August] Ludum Dare 33, participate and do an online poll
- [End of October] Deadline for the Independent Game Festival
- [December] Ludum Dare 34, participate
- [End of January 2016] Nordic Game Jam, interview of organisers
- [March 2016] Train Jam, participate
- [June, during the master exhibition] Exhibition Jam, doing a gamejam during the exhibition

References

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- [3] Graham Berridge, *Events Design and Experience*, Routledge, 1st edition, 2006.